Occupational hazard by RedHatMeg

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Jane thought that she didn't need to worry about Jim Hopper. One phone call proved her wrong.

Occupational hazard

Even when Jane was hiding in Hopper's cabin, she didn't put much thought into *that* possibility.

Oh, sure, she was worried when he wasn't coming back at promised hour. And sometimes, in the moments of waiting for him on her own, there was this voice on the back of her head telling her: *What if the bad men got him? What if he's already dead?* But she was quickly dismissing it. After all, Hopper was a grown up man – a policeman for that matter! – and could take care of himself. In some ways he was also quite intimidating – big posture, booming voice and all… He also seemed to know what to do to evade danger, so frankly, the whole idea that they could get *him* was just silly…

Besides, from what Hopper was telling her, she gathered that his work was rather boring, most of the time. There were people coming to him with problems such as: kids blowing out the music in the night, elderly neighbors bickering over the fence and accusing each other of doing nasty things, or something equally as uneventful.

Truly, Hawkins was a place where nothing was really happening.

And when the bad men were finally moving out of Hawkins; when the threat from government and Upside Down was far away, she let herself believe that from now on everything will be fine. She had Mike, Lucas, Dustin, Max and Will, whom she liked to spend time with. She had Nancy and Mrs. Byers, who were very nice to her and often were giving her advices. She had Hopper who was now officially her dad. She had her family and friends, therefore she didn't have a reason to be worried.

Well, she *was* worried about keeping the low profile for the next year; she was worried if she was going to fit in the middle school; if Mike and others will be able to come to her next weekend or how the Snow Ball will turn out.

But she wasn't worried about Hopper. Especially not after he faced the Mind Flayer with her; not after he fought with demodogs and went to Upside Down to save Will. She could be worried about

others, but not about chief Jim Hopper.

This all changed one evening, with one phone call from Joyce Byers.

“Hop has been stabbed.”

At first Jane thought it didn’t mean what it really meant. She thought that she misheard Mrs. Byers. But when Joyce went on about the whole stabbing thing, it was slowly sinking in.

Apparently Mrs. Byers was working her nightshift at the till this evening and there were these two youngsters who wanted to take the money from the cash register. One of them pointed gun at her, and Hopper – who happened to be in the store at the time – took care of the gunman, but both robbers didn’t leave without a fight. Somehow, someway one of them managed to stab Hopper, before they both flew out of the crime scene.

And suddenly Jane felt like something heavy dropped in her stomach. Some part of her brain still couldn’t believe what she just heard, while the other part was just screaming that it wasn’t supposed to happen…

“I’m on the ER right now. They’re patching him up.”

“Patching him up?” Jane repeated, not sure what any of it meant.

“He has a surgery. The doctors are trying to stop the bleeding and close the wound. That’s all I know for now.”

The more Jane was listening to it, the more scared she was. She felt like it was just some kind of dream – one of those dreams about bad men or the Demogorgon coming for her close ones and killing them, while she couldn’t do anything about it.

But this wasn’t a dream. It was a reality. A harsh, nightmarish reality.

“Jonathan and Will are going to drive you to the hospital.” Mrs. Byers continued and her tone seemed to indicate that she wanted to make Jane feel better. The girl could almost see the soft smile on Joyce’s face as she added: “Don’t worry. You and I both know he’s a tough guy. If demons from other dimension couldn’t kill him, what is

a stab wound?"

Jane smiled at this reassurance, but her smile was weak.

"Just hang on. The boys will soon get to you."

"Okay." Was all Jane could say, before she disconnected.

Immediately after that she fell on the couch, processing the news. It still felt like dream and she really wanted to wake up from it.

Jane tightened her fists and stood up. She needed to find out for sure. She needed to check on him right here, right now. So she took her blindfold and covered her eyes. She was focusing for a minute on Hopper, trying to locate him. Soon she found herself in the familiar black void. It took her a moment to notice a long operating table with motionless body lying on it and people in surgery masks standing over said body. This view made her uncomfortable as she remembered Hawkins National Lab scientist sometimes wearing surgeon gear.

Jane didn't know what was happening exactly. She couldn't see who was lying on the operating table, because the surgeons were obscuring the view. She could, however, sense tension in the air. She slowly took couple of steps closer to the table and soon she was able to see a familiar brown head. She felt how her heart sunk as she was staring at unconscious Hopper with oxygen mask on his face.

So it was true. Hopper has been stabbed and now he was fighting for his life. And suddenly Jane felt fear sipping through her. The fear that this surgery will go wrong and Hopper will die. The fear that she will never see him walking into the cabin, apologizing for being late *again*; she will never hear him complaining about silly things; she will never see him smoking in the evening or smiling at her in the morning. And so Jane had to face the perspective that this big, grumpy man she grew to love like a father, will die from a stab wound.

Beep… beep… beep…

She didn't know where it was coming from, but it seemed too loud.

Almost ominous.

Beep… beep… beep…

She knew it was coming from some kind of device, but she couldn't see it.

Beep… beep… beep… Knock-knock…

Suddenly it morphed into a knocking sound and Jane's contact with the surgery room was broken. She was once again in the cabin, sitting on the couch with a blindfold on. And someone was knocking to her door.

She took the blindfold off and wiped her nose. At first an old instinct told her to not move and wait until the intruder will leave (*she's supposed to open the door only when she hears Hopper's special knocking…*), but after a moment she realized she wasn't in hiding anymore.

It were probably Jonathan and Will. They've come to take her to the hospital.

Still she was suspicious. What if it were the bad men?

"El?" Jonathan's voice called from the other side of the front door. "Are you there?"

And so her suspicions were proven false. It really were just Byers brothers. She immediately stood up, quickly ran to the door and opened it. Jonathan was standing at her porch and gave her a friendly smile. In the car behind him was sitting Will who also smiled and waved to her. However, after a moment they both got serious.

"Do you want to take something?" Jonathan asked. "Or are we good to go?"

She turned back to look at the cabin. Was there anything she wanted to take to the hospital? Her mind was empty. And so she just put the jacket on, took the keys, turned the lights off and closed the cabin.

Soon she found herself sitting next to Jonathan who was driving her

to the hospital. For the first couple of minutes all three of them were driving in silence, but then Will broke it from the backseat.

“Don’t worry, El. It all will be fine.”

He seemed uncomfortable. Like he wasn’t sure it was right thing to say. But then Jonathan added with another reassuring smile:

“You know chief. It takes more than two thugs to defeat him.”

For the first time in this whole mess she thought about the robbers. About two youngsters who first pointed a gun at Mrs. Byers, and then stabbed Hopper and fled away. They were to blame of his current predicament. It was because of them that she was now so scared of losing him. She felt anger rising inside of her.

She wanted to hurt them. Really, really bad. Just like those two boys who were threatening to cut Dustin’s teeth out if Mike won’t jump of off the cliff. She only needed to track the robbers down…

“Did they found them?” She asked, looking at Jonathan.

He, on the other hand, gave her a short glance before he went back to the road.

“Not yet, no. But Callahan is in the hospital, asking mom questions about the whole incident.”

But Callahan was incompetent. Hopper often complained about him not putting enough effort into his work. Powell was a bit better, but still he and Callahan tended to be rather lazy. From what Hopper was saying the most reliable person on the station was Flo, so maybe she should be the one getting Mrs. Byers’ testimony.

But who knows – maybe this time Callahan will do his job. Maybe this time he and Powell will try hard to find the culprits. After all, their friend was in critical condition.

First thing that caught Jane's attention, when she got to Joyce and Callahan, sitting next to surgery room, was the big red stain on Mrs. Byers' sleeves and knees. Her hands were also red but only on the rims, so the girl suspected that Jonathan and Will's mom at least tried to wash it off when she got a moment. Nevertheless, the red was still there. And it was all Jane could think about, even when Mrs. Byers and Callahan (who was asking her if she needed anything) saw her and called her over.

It was a lot of red. So much red on someone's clothes never promised anything good. And Jane knew perfectly well what it was and who it belonged to…

"Jane?" Joyce asked.

The more Jane was staring at the red, the more she felt weak in her knees. She almost fell down, but Jonathan caught her and gave her body a proper support. Then he and Will led her to the chair and sat her down. Not wanting to look at the blood on Mrs. Byers' clothes, she fixed her eyes on the other side of corridor.

"Poor kid." Callahan said and he sounded oddly sincere. "And poor chief, really. But these kind of things are the occupational hazard, I guess."

Jane raised her head to look at him. She almost asked him what's occupational hazard, but he already thought of her as stupid, so, instead, she decided to ponder it on her own. She knew that "hazard" meant "danger" (she knew as much because she was seeing "fire hazard" signs sometimes), but she wasn't sure what "occupational" meant.

"Even bleeding on the floor, he wasn't losing his head." Mrs. Byers suddenly said, a sad smile on her lips. "I was scared he will die on me, but he just kept telling me to pressure the wound and call the ambulance."

A quick image flashed in Jane's mind – one of Hawkins National Lab scientists lying on the floor with a really nasty wound in his leg; and Hopper taking his belt off and tightening it around the wounded leg…

“He’s tough son of a bitch.” Callahan turned to Jane and gave her a reassuring smile. “He will be fine, you’ll see.”

But Jane could sense that he wasn’t so sure.

Why were everybody telling her it was going to be okay? Especially because she knew it was very highly possible that it won’t?

“Well,” Callahan said suddenly. “I’ve got the testimony. I’ll go look for the robbers. Call the station if anything turns out about chief.”

“We’ll do.” Joyce gave him a forced smile.

When he left, there was a moment of awkward silence. And then Jane decided to go to the hospital phone booth and call Mike. She suspected that he didn’t know about the stabbing, or else he would be here with her. And he always knew what to say.

Will came with her and borrowed her a quarter for the phone booth. At first she heard Nancy’s voice asking who’s there.

“Can I talk with Mike?” Jane’s own voice was cracking.

“Something wrong, El?” Nancy asked, clearly sounded worried.

For a moment Jane was thinking whenever she should just tell her she wanted to speak with Mike, but ultimately she decided to do different thing.

“Hop…” She started, her voice cracking even more. “Hopper was stabbed.”

For a moment there was silence on the other side of the line. And when Nancy finally replied, she sounded just like the others:

“Don’t worry. Everything will be alright.” Then she immediately added: “I will take Mike to the hospital. Maybe we will also stop at Lucas, Dustin and Max’s places and take then too.”

Jane thought it would be nice, but will their families let them go at this time of the night? She voiced her opinion.

“This is an emergency. I’m sure they will understand. You hang on there, while I gather the party.”

Even before Nancy got to Hargroves, Hendersons and Sinclairs, the Party knew about the stabbing. That’s because Mike called each and one of them through walkie-talkie and informed them about the happening. He couldn’t say much, even though they were asking him about details, but they all agreed that they needed to get to El and be with her.

Mr. Hargrove had objections whenever he should let his stepdaughter go to visit the chief of police (a man he didn’t even know personally) and in the end he didn’t, even when Nancy argued that it was to comfort their common friend. It didn’t stop Max, who skipped from her house through the window.

Other parents were more cooperative. They were shocked to hear what happened to chief Hopper and not only agreed to let their children meet with Jane, but also offered to drive them themselves. Somewhere along the way Steve also came.

So soon at the surgery room there was a crowd of people waiting for the news about their police chief. The adults were talking with Joyce, who filled everybody (as much as she was able) about what happened.

“Did they found the robbers?” Mrs. Henderson asked.

“Callahan is looking for them.” Joyce explained.

“So they are gone forever.” Mr. Sinclair commented.

“Don’t say that!” His wife elbowed him lightly.

“Why? It’s true.” He retorted.

Meanwhile the kids were trying to comfort Jane.

“It’s going to be okay.” Mike, who was sitting next to her, said.

She looked at him. He gave her a reassuring smile.

“Friends don’t lie.” She repeated.

“It’s not a lie.” He replied. “I know it will be fine.”

Jane gave him a questioning look but didn’t say anything.

“Come on, El.” Dustin added. “Chief is a big, strong man.” He got closer to her and whispered: “Besides, he fought with demons from other dimension. One tiny knife is nothing.”

The others were agreeing with that statement, but Jane still wasn’t entirely sure. Mike saw it and explained:

“We need to believe that everything will be okay. We can’t lose hope when there is still a chance he will be alright.”

Maybe he was right. But somehow her mind kept coming back to that horrifying thought that Hopper was going to die. She wondered what she would do if that happened; where shall she go when he will be gone. Just when she thought that she could be happy again and have a family, those two robbers were taking her father away. Sure, she could always go back to momma and aunt… but here, in Hawkins, was her life. She didn’t want to leave her friends. And she didn’t want to leave the cabin which became her home ever since she was adopted by Hopper.

But most of all, she didn’t want to imagine life without him. Just like she didn’t want to imagine life without Mike or any of her friends. Before them, she didn’t know what true kindness meant; and before Hopper she didn’t know how it’s like to have a father, because all she knew was Papa and Papa never cared about her.

Suddenly the surgeon came out of the room Hopper was operated in. All eyes turned on him and Jane waited with heavy heart for what the doctor was going to say.

“How is he?” It was Mrs. Byers who asked this question first. She even stood up from her seat.

“He’s stable.” The surgeon replied.

It didn’t tell Jane much but she was at least happy it wasn’t: “He’s

dead."

"We need to keep him on observation, just to be sure… but he will live."

A wave of relief washed over Jane. Hopper will live and that's all what matter to her at the moment.

The brightness woke him up. A second later he realized he was lying in the bed, but it wasn't his own bed, because it just didn't *feel* like his bed. Then his mind caught up with the surroundings. He was in the hospital, he was wearing a gown and there were people standing around his bed and staring at him. Not just Jane, Byers family and the Party (as he would suspect), but Party's parents too.

A few images from last evening flashed in his mind giving him the final context on why he was in the hospital.

Oh, yeah, he was stabbed. By two youngsters who tried to rob Joyce.

Well, this was something he would never expect to happen in a boring shithole like Hawkins…

"Welcome back, chief." Dustin was the first to speak. He gave Hopper a wide smile.

The policeman wanted to say that he didn't go anywhere, but then his guests started to express their relief and happiness that he was alive and relatively well. Ted Wheeler even called him one of the best men he ever knew. It was quite interesting, to say the least. Most of the time the residents of Hawkins weren't so cordial with him.

Once in a while his eyes were moving to his left, where Jane was standing. She was quiet most of the time, but he could see her expression that seemed to scream worry and sadness, and fear, and all the little emotions he couldn't quite put his finger on.

And so Jim Hopper told his guests he would like to talk with his daughter alone.

"Oh, yeah, sure." Ted said and all of them started to leave.

Soon there were only the two of them – an injured chief of police and his daughter. Immediately when she was sure that everybody was in the corridor, Jane embraced Hopper. The sudden commotion made his wound hurt, but he only hissed and patted Jane on the back.

“Yes, yes, I’m glad to see you too.” He said and was going to break the embrace, when he heard her sobbing next to his ear.

“I… I thought I’m going to lose you.” She cried. “I thought you will die.”

In this very moment he realized that Jane must have been absolutely terrified, when she heard the news. And it was a quite odd feeling considering that ever since Sarah’s death, he didn’t care much about the possibility of getting hurt in action. Since he didn’t have anybody to come back to; anybody who would be devastated by his death, he didn’t concern himself with the thought that he one day might not come back from work. In fact he was aware that some part of him wanted to die, preferably from lung cancer due to long-term smoking.

It downed on him that he had someone to come back again. A young girl waiting for him every evening. And now this girl was confronted with the possibility that even though the gate to the Upside Down was closed and the government people were gone, the world didn’t stop to be dangerous.

“I’m sorry to scare you.” He said to her ear and finally broke the embrace. “But I’m a policeman. I had to intervene when crime is committed.”

“I know.” Jane replied but still seemed upset.

“Look,” He put his hands on her shoulders. “I’m not gonna lie, something like this may happen again. Getting stabbed, shot or simply wounded in action is an occupational hazard for policemen. It happens all the time.”

She looked like a sudden realization downed on her.

“Callahan said that word too.” She told him soon after. When Hopper gave her a surprised look, she explained: “The ‘occupational hazard’.”

“It means danger specific for certain line of work.” He explained. “For example, the builders are wearing helmets all the time to protect their heads from falling bricks.”

She nodded with understanding.

“And policemen, well…” He started with uneasiness. “we are trained to deal with dangerous people and keep others safe from them. Sometimes we can get hurt too.”

“Why won’t you change your job?” Jane asked.

That was actually a good question. Why wouldn’t he change the job to something more safe? Frankly, he already had an answer.

“Because someone has to do it.”

Not so long time ago he would also say that Hawkins is too boring for any serious crime. The events of last two years and last night proved him wrong.

“Don’t worry. Most of the time I know what I’m doing.” He added with a light smile.

For the next couple of weeks Hopper was recovering. He spent five days in hospital and when the doctor were sure there’s no need for another operation, he was sent home, but even after that people were strangely protective of him. Flo was keeping him in at the desk, urging Powell and Callahan to do the field work. Joyce – as well as the kids – was checking on him and asking him if he needed anything repeatedly.

But most importantly Jane was using her blindfold to watch him in the evening. Just to be sure that occupational hazard won’t accur.